ORIGIN/ACTION

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

AIRGRAM

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A-3027
NO.

HANDLING INDICATOR

TO : DEPARTMENT OF STATE

INFO: ANKARA, ATHENS, COPENHAGEN, OSLO, NICOSIA, PARIS, THESSALONIKI, USUN

FROM : Amembassy LONDON

DATE: May 9, 1967

SUBJECT: Greek Coup: Exchange in House of Lords

REF :

Enclosed is the record of a May 4 exchange between Lord Beswick, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Commonwealth Affairs, and others regarding HMG's position on the Greek coup.

Among points made by Beswick:

Appearing now to preach to the Greeks would not necessarily bring about Greece's early return to constitutional government.

The King behaved with very commendable and considerable courage. His influence has been used to moderate any extremist action.

Enclosure:

As stated

BRUCE

DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/MR

REVIEWED BY WP DATE 6 MAY 1982

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Clearances:

noted JA 5/11

UNCLASSIFIED FUR Enclosure to A-3027

DECLASSIFIED

[4 MAY 1967]

LORD MILFORD: My Lords, in view of the fact that the Greek monarchy exists to-day largely due to British policy after the Second World War, and in view of the reports in the Press to the effect that King Constantine was reluctant to endorse the actions of Fascist officers, and did so only under coercion, would the Government consider making a statement to indicate that the democratic people of this country would be with him if he restored the Constitution and held the elections that he promised?

LORD BESWICK: No, my Lords. I think it is agreed that the King of Greece behaved with very commendable and considerable courage and that his influence has been used in order to moderate any extremist action. I think, in the light of the courage and wisdom shown, there is all the more reason why we should not attempt to tell him what to do.

GREEK GOVERNMENT AND CIVIL LIBERTIES

3.14 p.m.

LORD MILFORD: My Lords, I beg leave to ask the Question which stands in my name on the Order Paper.

[The Question was as follows:

To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they have taken to express their strong disapproval of the nature and actions of the present Government in Greece.]

LORD BESWICK: My Lords, the situation in Greece is still developing and it might be harmful at this stage to pass judgment, but I am confident that the Greek Government and people are in no doubt about the strong feelings which are held in this country, and in many other countries, on civil liberties and democratic rights.

LORD MILFORD: My Lords, while I thank the noble Lord for that Answer, I find it very unsatisfactory. Will the Government declare their intention not to recognise the self-appointed Government of Greece, against the will of the Greek people, and urge on their Minister in Athens to impress the authorities that the General Election projected for May 28 should proceed, with all parties participating?

LORD BESWICK: My Lords, I am bound to say that I deeply appreciate the noble Lord's interest in democratic rights. So far as the question of recognition is concerned, this was dealt with by a Question earlier this week. I should have thought that all of us in this country would hope that Greece will return to constitutional government as early as possible. But I do not think it would necessarily bring that about if we appeared to be preaching to them now.

LORD INGLEWOOD: My Lords, would the noble Lord bear in mind when considering any future action in regard to this deplorable business, which we hope will soon be resolved, that there is in Greece a widespread and understandable fear of Communist excesses, of which they had all too great experience during the later war years and the years immediately after the war?

LORD BESWICK: My Lords, I really have nothing to add to what I have already said.

LORD FRASER OF LONSDALE: My Lords, may I ask the noble Lord whether he does not think that in foreign affairs it is often a good thing to "mind your own business"?

LORD MILFORD: My Lords, is the Minister aware that we who were in Greece at the time of these calamitous events were besieged by our many friends in various walks of life—artists, architects, writers, university professors and so on—of all political Parties, to do what we could in Britain to urge our Government and the British people to help them to get rid of this ignominious military dictatorship, and help to restore the Constitution and hold a General Election?

LORD BESWICK: My Lords, I am aware of the noble Lord's interest. I am aware, too, of the fact that one of the more notable Members of your Lordships' House died in Greece fighting for the independence of that country, I think 143 years ago this month. I should hope that it would still be possible for Greece to come through these struggles to a Parliamentary and constitutional form of government.

THE EARL OF DUNDEE: My Lords, is it not a curious thing that people who are most anxious to reduce our position as a world Power should also be most anxious to dictate to foreign governments how they should behave?

LORD GIFFORD: My Lords, while I appreciate that Her Majesty's Government have not had time to evaluate what is happening in Greece, may I ask my noble friend whether he can assure the House that, if and in so far as the actions of the Greek Government violate the principles of the NATO Charter, Her Majesty's Government will make protests through the appropriate organ of NATO?

LORD BESWICK: My Lords, at the moment, our principal concern is to protect the rights of the British people there. I will again say that it is one thing to hold views about the virtues or otherwise of a foreign Government, but that we do not necessarily further our views simply by publicly preaching to that Government.